



US011845553B1

(12) **United States Patent**
Buttermore

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 11,845,553 B1**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Dec. 19, 2023**

(54) **APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR ORDINANCE MOUNTING SYSTEM**

6,817,639	B2 *	11/2004	Schmalz	.....	B65G 47/91
					294/185
7,677,622	B2	3/2010	Dunkmann		
9,091,612	B2	7/2015	Lehmann		
9,527,605	B1	12/2016	Gentry		
9,573,684	B2	2/2017	Kimchi		
9,581,148	B1 *	2/2017	Solomon	.....	B66C 1/0287
9,821,721	B2	11/2017	Casagrande		
10,267,453	B2	4/2019	Casagrande		
10,483,142	B1	11/2019	Tan		
10,514,024	B1 *	12/2019	Shoemaker, Jr.	.....	F04B 35/04

(71) Applicant: **Neil Buttermore**, Gunnison, CO (US)

(72) Inventor: **Neil Buttermore**, Gunnison, CO (US)

(73) Assignee: **Neil Buttermore**, Newport Beach, CA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(Continued)

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

(21) Appl. No.: **17/824,592**

CN	104323657	2/2015
CN	104622187	5/2015

(22) Filed: **May 25, 2022**

(Continued)

(51) **Int. Cl.**

B64D 1/04	(2006.01)
B64D 5/00	(2006.01)
B64C 39/02	(2023.01)
B64U 101/05	(2023.01)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

“Vacuum Controllers, Gauges, and Systems” by Cole-Parmer Instrument Company, LLC, Web page <<https://www.coleparmer.com/c/vacuum-controllers-gauges-and-systems>>, 4 pages, Mar. 8, 2022.

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **B64D 1/04** (2013.01); **B64C 39/024** (2013.01); **B64D 5/00** (2013.01); **B64U 2101/05** (2023.01)

(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Richard G Davis

(74) Attorney, Agent, or Firm — Raymond W. Armentrout; Bamert Regan PLLC

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC B64U 2101/15; B64U 2101/60; B64U 2101/64; B64D 1/04; B64D 1/08
See application file for complete search history.

(57)

ABSTRACT

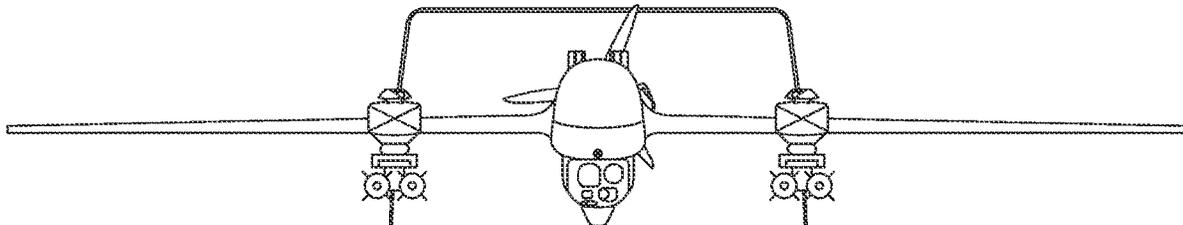
Embodiments of a payload attachment system secure a payload to a wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft) using one or more vacuum mounting modules, wherein each vacuum mounting module comprises at least one vacuum pump controllably coupled to a micro-controller, a vacuum cup fluidly coupled to the at least one vacuum pump, and a transceiver that receives an instruction corresponding to one of a vacuum cup actuation signal or a vacuum cup release signal.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,616,215	A	10/1986	Maddalena		
4,925,225	A *	5/1990	Dost	.....	B66C 1/0293
					294/186
5,244,242	A	9/1993	Goedecke		
5,795,001	A *	8/1998	Burke	.....	B65G 49/061
					294/185

13 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



(56)

References Cited

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

10,723,276	B2	7/2020	Casagrande	
10,737,632	B2	8/2020	Casagrande	
2005/0119789	A1	6/2005	Seeman	
2009/0242719	A1	10/2009	Carnevali	
2013/0299667	A1	11/2013	Casagrande	
2015/0375401	A1	12/2015	Dunkmann	
2016/0023762	A1	1/2016	Wang	
2017/0197719	A1	7/2017	Kwon	
2019/0077027	A1*	3/2019	Tanaka	B64D 1/22
2019/0375604	A1*	12/2019	Kuo	B25B 11/007
2020/0198546	A1	6/2020	Casagrande	
2020/0247539	A1*	8/2020	Shoemaker, Jr.	B64U 10/13
2020/0331406	A1	10/2020	Casagrande	

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

CN	105757110	7/2016
CN	109552194	4/2019
CN	114379465	4/2022

KR	20080054468	6/2008
WO	2014043261	3/2014
WO	2018227203	12/2018

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

“Freedom IQ Vacuum System” Information for Use pamphlet, Rev A, 2019, 20 pages, IFU-03-004, Freedom Innovations, LLC, Irving, CA.

“Precision Vacuum Monitor” by Lab Society, Web page <<https://labsociety.com/lab-equipment/precision-vacuum-monitor/>>, 8 pages, Mar. 8, 2022.

“Vacuum Pads for Uneven Surfaces” by McMaster-Carr, Web page <<https://www.mcmaster.com/vacuum-cup-mounts/vacuum-pads-for-uneven-surfaces/>>, 2 pages, Apr. 9, 2021.

“Static-Control Vacuum Pads for Uneven Surfaces” by McMaster-Carr, Web page <<https://www.mcmaster.com/vacuum-cup-mounts/static-control-vacuum-pads-for-uneven-surfaces/>>, 1 page, Apr. 9, 2021.

“Freedom Innovations Collection” by PROTEORUSA, Web page <<https://www.proteorusa.com/freedominnovationscollection/>>, 3 pages, Mar. 8, 2022.

* cited by examiner

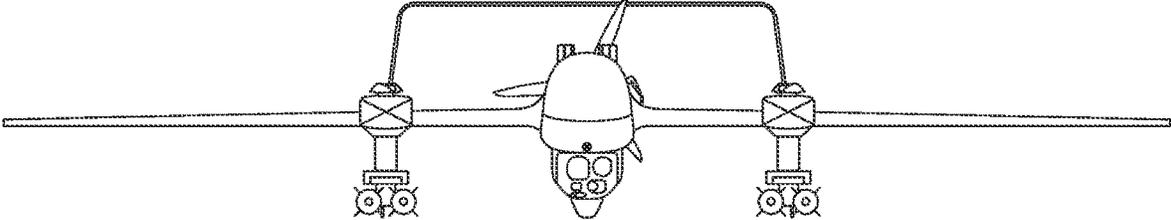


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

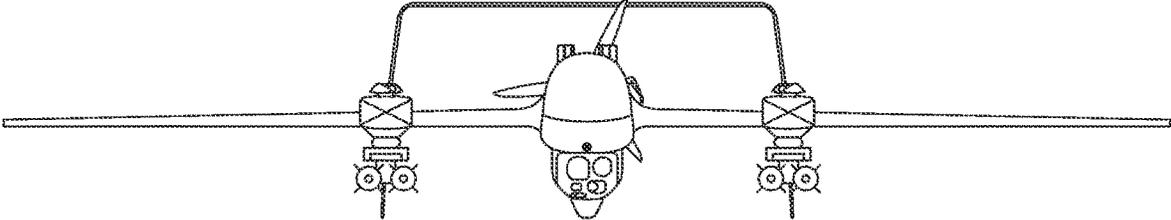


FIG. 2

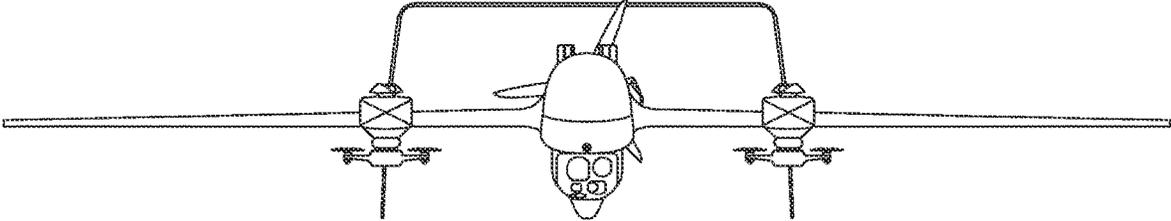


FIG. 3

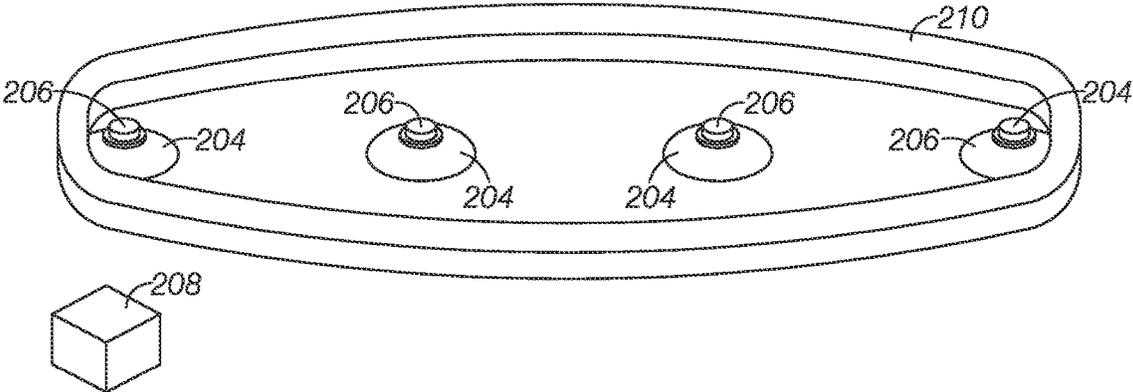


FIG. 4

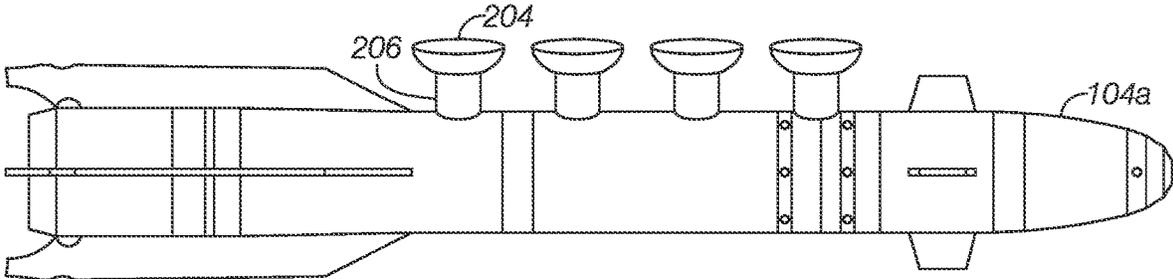


FIG. 5

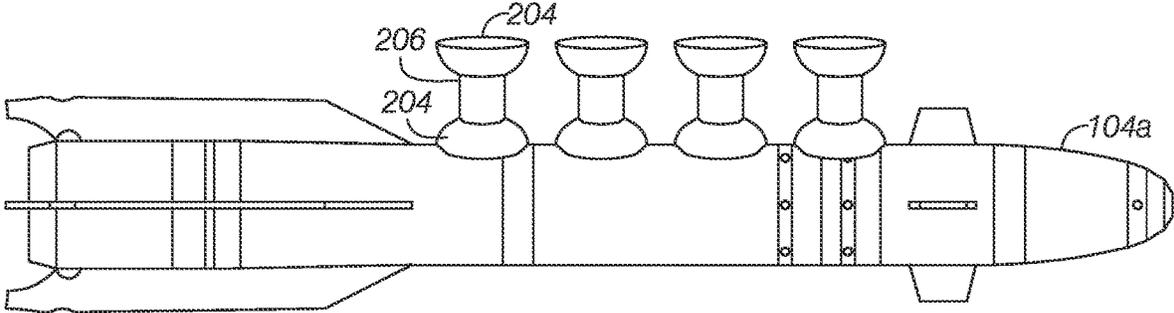


FIG. 6

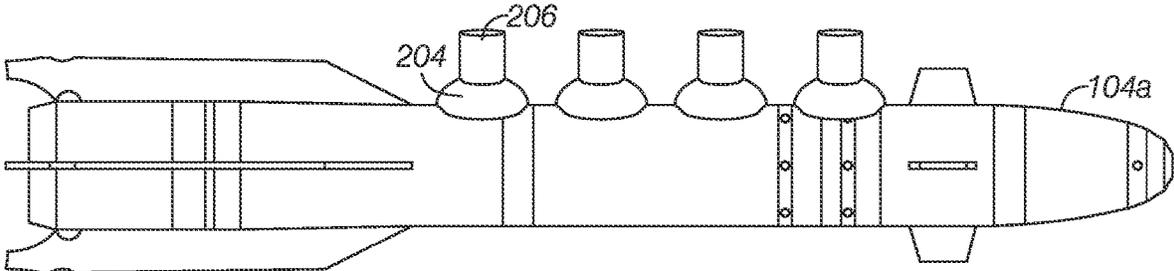


FIG. 7

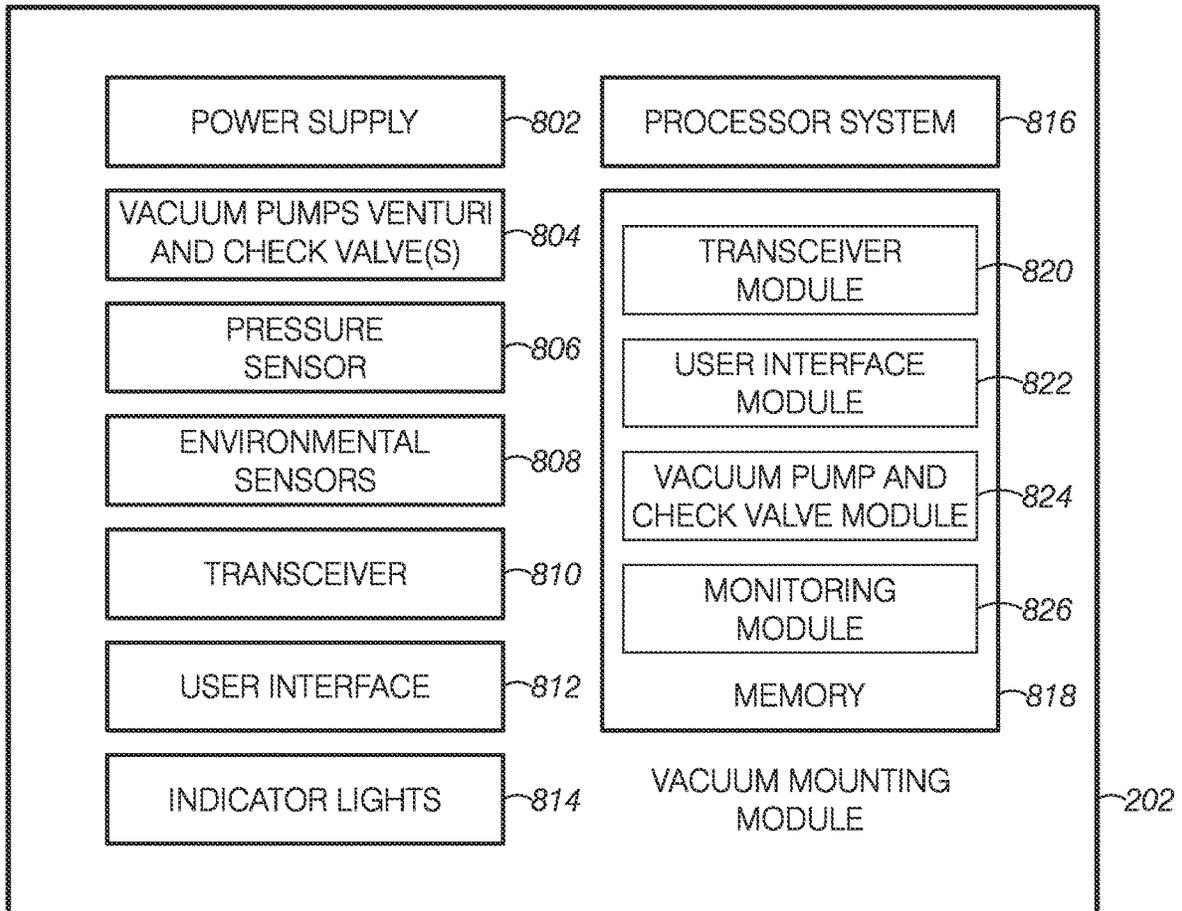


FIG. 8

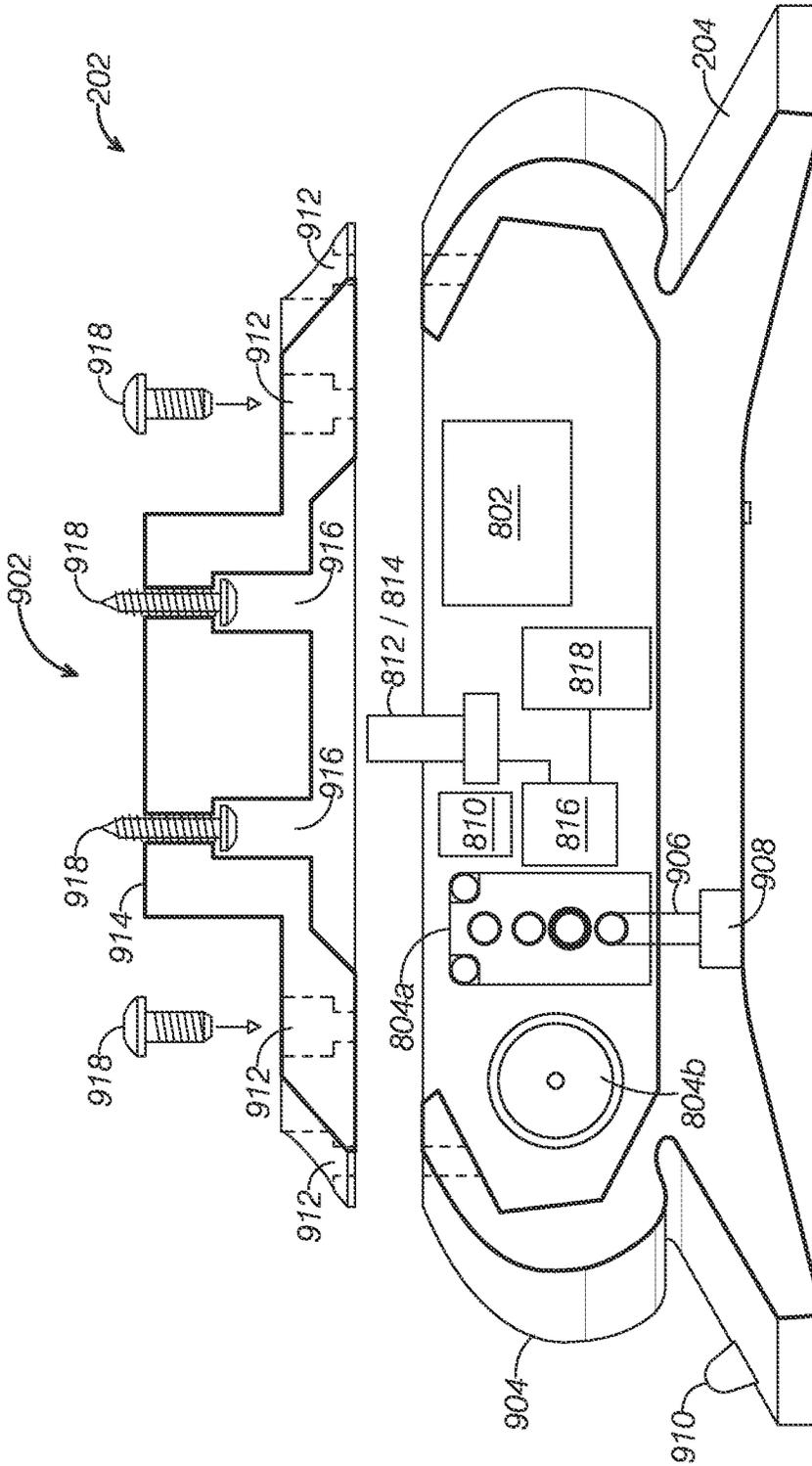


FIG. 9

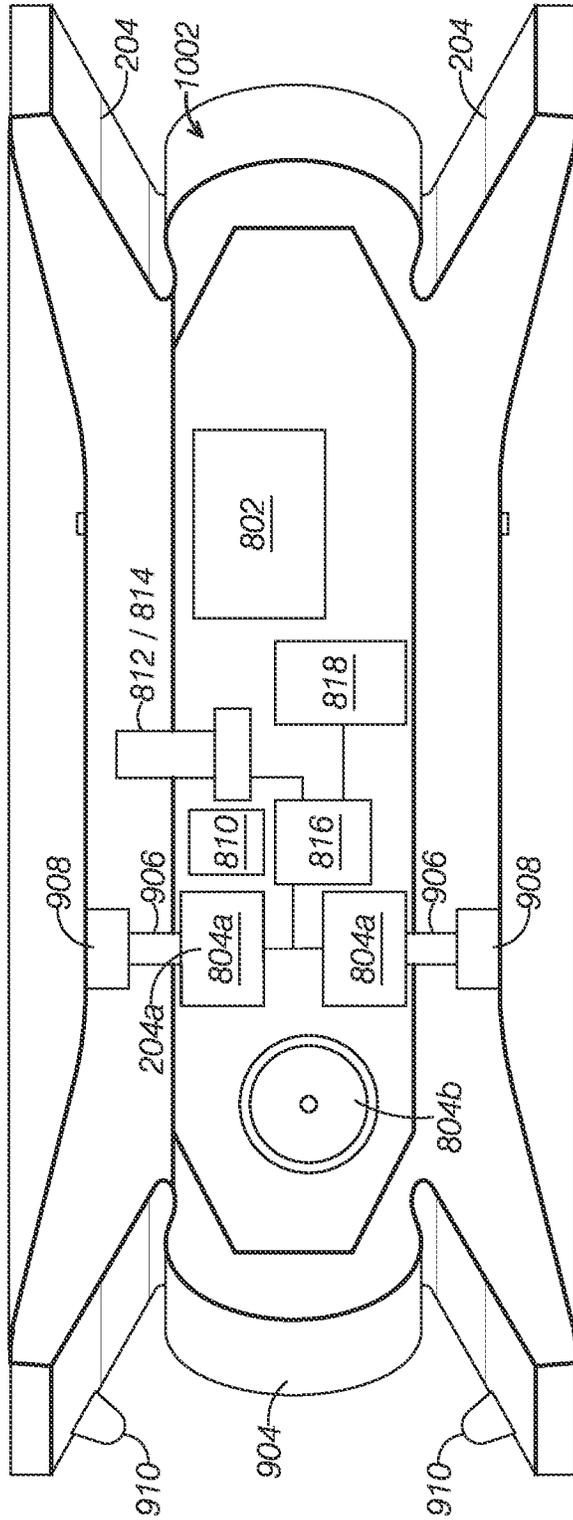


FIG. 10

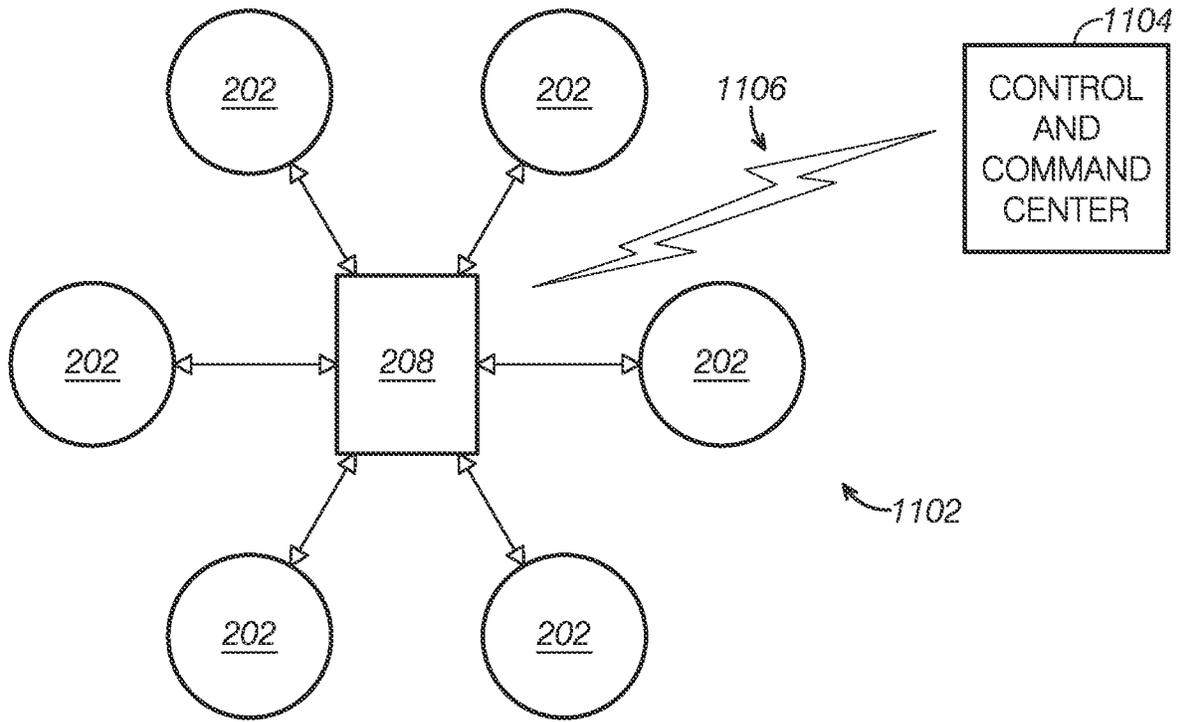


FIG. 11

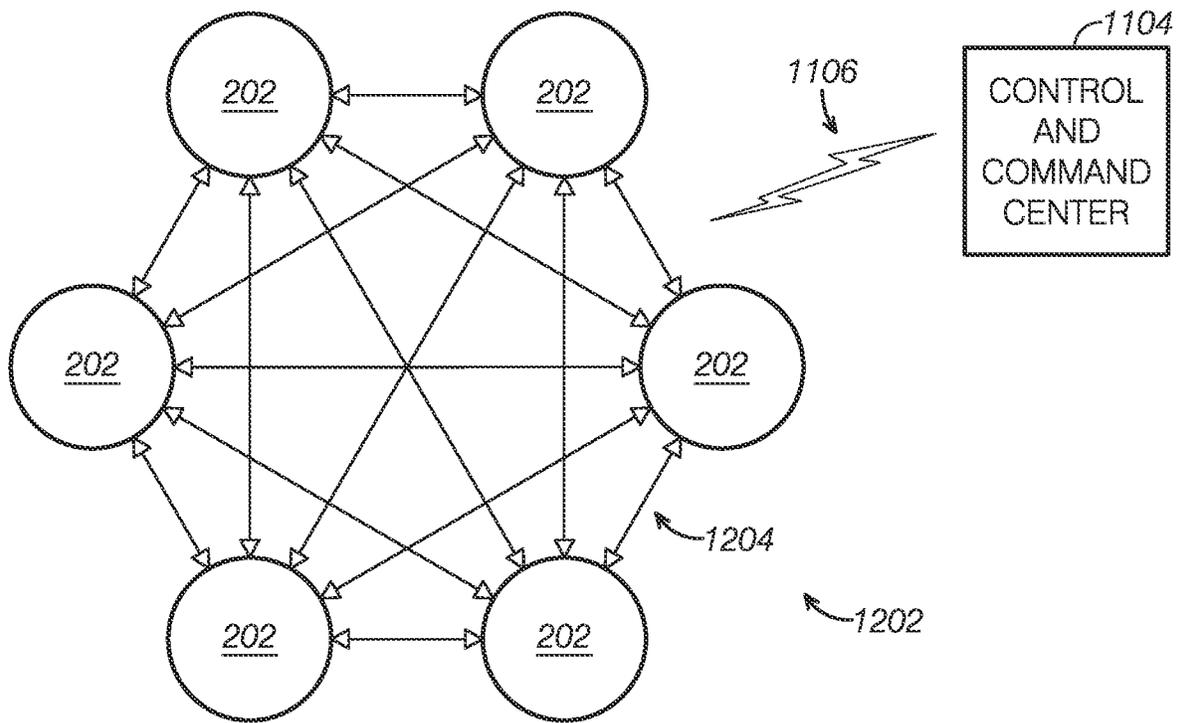


FIG. 12

1

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR ORDINANCE MOUNTING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In various situations, it is desirable to releasably secure ordinance, interchangeably referred to herein as a payload, to an aircraft, unmanned drone, or the like. Typically, such ordinance are suspended from the fuselage and/or wings of the aircraft or the frame of a drone. Payloads are secured at a hard point that is structurally capable of supporting a predefined payload that weighs less than some predefined maximum weight. The payload is mateably secured to the aircraft or drone using a connector on the distal end of a pylon. The payload may be secured directly to the pylon. Or, if multiple payloads are secured to a pylon, the payloads may be secured to a rack that is secured to the distal end of the pylon.

FIG. 1 is a front view diagram of an example legacy military purposed aerial drone **102**. Here, the non-limiting example payload **104** is the AGM-114 (air to ground missile) Hellfire. With a weight of just over one hundred pounds, the AGM-114 Hellfire may be a suitable payload **104** for a drone **102** because of its relatively small size and light weight. Another non-limiting example of a payload **104** is a smaller drone that might be used for surveillance and/or for delivering ordinance. Such payloads **104** are suspended from the wings or fuselage of the drone **102** using a pylon **106**.

The illustrated example drone **102** is propelled forward by an engine and propellor **106**. Some military purposed drones are jet propelled. One or more VTOL (vertical takeoff and landing) motors and propellers may be used for field launching and landing of the drone **102**. Alternatively, some legacy drones have landing gear for takeoff and landing on a flat surface, such as an airfield, road, aircraft carrier, or the like.

One problem encountered in the arts is that the radar reflections from a pylon **106** may be undesirable, particularly if the drone is stealthy. That is, a stealthy drone is designed with an exterior that minimally reflects incident radar energy. However, the pylon **106** may itself be a source of undesirable radar reflections. Accordingly, in the arts of stealth technologies, there is a need in the arts for improved methods, apparatus, and systems for reducing radar reflections from pylons **106** used to secure ordinance to a drone.

Further, ordinance is typically secured to the pylon **106** while the drone **102** at a base station, such as an airfield, aircraft carrier, etc. In practice, travelling from the base station to the battlefield, and then returning back to the base station after the ordinance has been released from the drone **102**, takes some amount of time (based on velocity of the drone **102** and distance between the base station and the battlefield site). Accordingly, in the arts of using a military purposed drone **102** or other aircraft, there is a need in the arts for improved methods, apparatus, and systems for quickly rearming military purposed drone **102** or other aircraft without the need to return to the base station.

Also, attaching ordinance to the pylons **106** of a drone or other aircraft is a time consuming effort for the ground crew. Accordingly, in the arts of releasably securing payloads **104** to a drone **102** or other aircraft, there is a need in the arts for improved methods, apparatus, and systems for quickly securing the payload **104** to the military purposed drone **102** or other aircraft.

Additionally, the attaching means that are used to secure the payload **104** to a pylon **106** (or rack) may be limiting in that both the pylon **106** (or rack) and the payload **104** must have corresponding connectors. If the connectors on the

2

pylon **106** do not match the connector on the payload **104**, the payload **104** cannot be secured to the pylon **106**. Accordingly, in the arts of releasably securing payloads **104** to a drone **102** or other aircraft, there is a need in the arts for improved methods, apparatus, and systems for securing the payloads **104** when the connectors on the pylon **106** and payload **104** do not correspond, or to secure the payload **104** with no connectors at all.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of a payload attachment system secure a payload to a wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft) using one or more vacuum mounting modules, wherein each vacuum mounting module comprises at least one vacuum pump controllably coupled to a micro-controller, a vacuum cup fluidly coupled to the at least one vacuum pump, and a transceiver that receives an instruction corresponding to one of a vacuum cup actuation signal or a vacuum cup release signal.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The components in the drawings are not necessarily to scale relative to each other. Like reference numerals designate corresponding parts throughout the several views.

FIG. 1 is a front view of a legacy military purposed aerial drone with ordinance secured to a legacy pylon.

FIG. 2 is a front view of the legacy military purposed aerial drone with missiles secured to the drone using an ordinance attachment system.

FIG. 3 is a front view of the legacy military purposed aerial drone with a plurality of small drones secured to the drone using an ordinance attachment system.

FIG. 4 is a side cut away view of the vacuum mounting module with a non-limiting example cover member.

FIG. 5 is a side view of a missile with four vacuum mounting modules, wherein the vacuum control unit is secured to the outer surface of the missile using a suitable releasable connector.

FIG. 6 is a side view of a missile with four vacuum mounting modules, wherein the vacuum mounting modules each have two opposing vacuum cups secured to the outer surface of the missile and to the wing or fuselage of the drone (or another type of aircraft).

FIG. 7 is a side view of a missile with four vacuum mounting modules, wherein the vacuum control unit is secured to a wing or fuselage of a drone (or another type of aircraft).

FIG. 8 is a side view diagram of an embodiment of a vacuum mounting module showing selected example electronic components.

FIG. 9 is a side cut away view of the vacuum mounting module with a non-limiting example cover member.

FIG. 10 is a side cut away view of the vacuum mounting module with two opposing vacuum cups.

FIG. 11 is a block diagram of a vacuum mounting module control system employing a designated vacuum control device that controls a plurality of vacuum mounting modules.

FIG. 12 is a block diagram of a vacuum mounting module control system employing mesh network wherein a plurality of vacuum mounting modules cooperatively control operation of the payload attachment system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 2 is a front view of the legacy military purposed aerial drone **102** with a plurality of missiles **104a** secured to

the drone using an ordinance attachment system **200**. FIG. 3 is a front view of the legacy aerial drone **102** with a plurality of small drones **104b** secured to the drone using an ordinance attachment system **200**. As defined herein, the term payload **104** refers to any payload of interest, such as the non-limiting example missiles **104a**, the small drones **104b**, and/or other ordinance. The payload **104** is releasably secured to the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft) using one or more vacuum mounting modules **202**.

FIG. 4 is a diagram of four vacuum mounting modules **202**. Each vacuum mounting module **202** includes a vacuum cup **204** and a vacuum control unit **206**. The vacuum cup **204** is disposed on an exterior of the vacuum mounting module **202**. The outside surface of the vacuum control unit **206** (opposing the vacuum cup **204**) is configured to be permanently secured to, or semipermanently secured to, a surface of a first object as described hereinbelow.

When a vacuum within the interior of the vacuum cup **204** is created by the vacuum control unit **206**, the vacuum mounting module **202** becomes releasably secured to the surface of a second object. In practice, in response to receiving a vacuum cup actuation signal from a vacuum control device **208**, the vacuum control unit **206** operates one or more internal vacuum pumps to create a vacuum having at least a predefined vacuum level (a negative atmospheric pressure) within the interior region of the vacuum cup **204**.

The vacuum cup actuation signal may be generated by a variety of vacuum control devices **208** depending upon the particular embodiment of the payload attachment system **100**. For example, a payload installer may provide input to the vacuum control device **208** to establish a vacuum. Here, the payload installer would pair their vacuum control device **208** with a plurality of vacuum control units **206** that are to be used for a securing a particular payload **104**.

For example, the payload **104** may be releasably secured the wing or fuselage of a drone **102** (or another type of aircraft). When the payload **104** is held in place by one or more payload installers, the vacuum pumps are actuated. The vacuum in each vacuum cup **204** then secures the payload **104** to the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft). During flight to a battlefield, the secured payload **104** remains in place. In response to a vacuum cup release signal, the vacuum in the vacuum cups **204** is released. The payload **104** then falls away from the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft).

In the various embodiments, pylons **106** are not needed to releasably secure payloads to the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft). An unexpected benefit provided by embodiments of the payload attachment system **100** is that the undesirable radar reflections from the pylons **106** are eliminated. Another unexpected benefit is that eliminating the weight of the pylons **106** may increase the total payload capacity of the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft). Also, connectors on the payload **104** and the pylon **106** are no longer required. Accordingly, the problem of unmatched connectors is removed.

Yet another advantage provided by embodiments of the payload attachment system **100** is that the time required to secure a payload **104** to a drone **102** (or another type of aircraft) is significantly reduced. And, the payload installers do not have to use specialty designed tools. Rather, the payload installers simply hold the payload **104** in place until the vacuum in the vacuum cups **204** are established.

When the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft) has VTOL capabilities, the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft) can make multiple deliveries while in the field. For

example, if a VTOL drone **102** is being used to deliver a plurality of AGM-114 Hellfire missiles **104a** (which only weigh 104 lbs. each) in a battlefield, the VTOL drone **102** may deliver a first plurality of missiles **104a** to targets of interest. Then, the VTOL drone **102** may return back to a safe location behind friendly lines (rather than the remotely located base station). The VTOL drone **102** may then be quickly reprovisioned with a second plurality of missiles **104a**, and then return to the battlefield.

The disclosed systems and methods for securing a payload **102** using the payload attachment system **100** will become better understood through review of the following detailed description in conjunction with the figures. The detailed description and figures provide examples of the various inventions described herein. Those skilled in the art will understand that the disclosed examples may be varied, modified, and altered without departing from the scope of the inventions described herein. Many variations are contemplated for different applications and design considerations, however, for the sake of brevity, each and every contemplated variation is not individually described in the following detailed description.

Throughout the following detailed description, a variety of examples for systems and methods for releasably securing a payload to a secured-to object using the payload attachment system **100** are provided. Related features in the examples may be identical, similar, or dissimilar in different examples. For the sake of brevity, related features will not be redundantly explained in each example. Instead, the use of related feature names will cue the reader that the feature with a related feature name may be similar to the related feature in an example explained previously. Features specific to a given example will be described in that particular example. The reader should understand that a given feature need not be the same or similar to the specific portrayal of a related feature in any given figure or example.

The following definitions apply herein, unless otherwise indicated.

“Substantially” means to be more-or-less conforming to the particular dimension, range, shape, concept, or other aspect modified by the term, such that a feature or component need not conform exactly. For example, a “substantially cylindrical” object means that the object resembles a cylinder, but may have one or more deviations from a true cylinder.

“Comprising,” “including,” and “having” (and conjugations thereof) are used interchangeably to mean including but not necessarily limited to, and are open-ended terms not intended to exclude additional, elements or method steps not expressly recited.

Terms such as “first”, “second”, and “third” are used to distinguish or identify various members of a group, or the like, and are not intended to denote a serial, chronological, or numerical limitation.

“Coupled” means connected, either permanently or releasably, whether directly or indirectly through intervening components. “Secured to” means directly connected without intervening components.

“Communicatively coupled” means that an electronic device is communicatively connected to another electronic device, either wirelessly or with a wire based connector, whether directly or indirectly through a communication network. “Controllably coupled” means that an electronic device controls operation of another electronic device.

Returning to FIG. 4, in preferred embodiments the vacuum control device **208** may reside within the drone **102**. The drone operator and/or the payload installer can com-

municatively couple their electronic devices to the vacuum control device 208 to cause generation of the actuation signal or release signal.

To pair a vacuum control unit 206 with a vacuum control device 208, the payload installer can simply turn on the plurality of vacuum mounting modules 202 that are to be used to secure a payload 104. Other vacuum mounting modules 202 that remain off will not respond to the vacuum control device 208. Other embodiments may use any suitable pairing method.

Once the vacuum control device 208 is paired with the vacuum mounting modules 202 and the payload is secured, drone 102 can travel to the battlefield. Then, the vacuum control device 208 can receive release instructions from the drone operator who is operating an electronic device that controls the drone 102 and the vacuum control device 208.

Since each vacuum mounting module 202 independently maintains a target vacuum level within its respective vacuum cup 204, the payload 102 may be secured for any period of time of interest. That is, the vacuum control unit 206 may actuate an internal vacuum pump as needed to maintain the predefined vacuum pressure between the surface and the vacuum cup 204. When the vacuum is released by the vacuum control unit 206, the vacuum cup 204 releases from the object.

An optional outer seal 210 may be used to form a seal between the surfaces of a wing or fuselage of the drone 102 (or other aircraft) and a payload 104. The outer seal 210 is a suitable semi-rigid or flexible compressible material that generally conforms to the shape and size of the outer perimeter of the one or more vacuum mounting modules 202. In a preferred embodiment, the outer seal 210 is made of neoprene, rubber, rubberized foam, or the like of a suitable thickness (height) that is sufficient to create a cavity between the surfaces of the two objects being secured together.

In the various embodiments employing the optional outer seal 210, in response to actuation of the payload attachment system 100, air is drawn out from the plurality of vacuum mounting modules 202. The flexible vacuum cups 204 partially collapse, decreasing their height as the vacuum within the vacuum cups 204 is created. The downward collapse of the vacuum cups 204 pulls the surfaces of a wing or fuselage of the drone 102 (or other aircraft) and the payload 104 together. Accordingly, the outer seal 210 is compressed to form a frictional seal between the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone 102 (or other aircraft) and the payload 104. Since the vacuum cups 204 are within the cavity formed by the compressed outer seal 210, the vacuum cups 204 are protected from weather and/or forces created by moving air. That is, since the outer seal 210 is made of a flexible and air tight material such as neoprene or the like, the outer seal 210 serves to diffuse weather and moving air away from the vacuum cups 204 to avoid disturbance to the vacuum cups 204. By protecting the seal of the vacuum cups 204, power requirements on the vacuum pumps may be decreased. Further, reliability may be increased to the leading edge vacuum cups 204 that may otherwise experience the greatest "lift" during movement of the drone 102.

In some embodiments, the outer seal 210 is affixed to the payload 102 or the surface the wing or fuselage of the drone 102 (or another type of aircraft) using a suitable means. The payload installer simply has to hold the payload 104 in place, preferably pushing the payload 104 gently onto the outer seal 210. When the vacuum is established, the payload installer may release the payload 104 since the payload 104 is now secured to the wing or fuselage drone 102. The outer

seal 210 may be affixed to the surface using a suitable adhesive, a ferromagnetic or electromagnetic strip, a ferromagnetic or electromagnetic material disposed within the outer seal 210, screws, bolts, loop and hook material, etc.

An advantage of securing the outer seal 210 to the wing or fuselage of a drone 102 (or another type of aircraft) is that a variety of different payloads 104 can be secured so long as a portion of the surface of the payload 104 is compatible with the outer seal 210 that is affixed to the drone 102 (or another type of aircraft). An advantage of affixing the outer seal 210 to the payload 104 is that a variety of different payloads 104 may be secured to the drone 102 (or another type of aircraft) at any location on the wing or the fuselage.

An advantage of using ferromagnetic or electromagnetic materials to secure the outer seal 210 is that different outer seals 210 may be selectively used depending upon the characteristics of the payload 104 and/or the drone 102 (or another type of aircraft). Further, if a magnetically secured outer seal 210 is damaged, the damaged outer seal 210 can be easily replaced in the field by a payload installer.

In some embodiments, the outer seal 210 is not secured to either of the surfaces of the drone 102 (or another type of aircraft) and the payload 104. In such embodiments, the payload 104 and the outer seal 210 are placed in position and are secured by the vacuum mounting modules 202. When the payload 104 is released, the outer seal 210 is sacrificed and simply falls to the ground.

In some instances, the outer seal 210 may be initially provided as a sheet of material that the payload installer may cut to a desired shape and size. The embodiment may be particularly advantageous when different types of payloads 104 are being releasably secured to the drone 102 (at the same time, or at different times). Alternatively, or additionally, a pre-cut outer seal 210 may be provided that is cut based on the dimensions of the payload 104.

FIG. 5 is a side view of a missile 104a with four vacuum mounting modules 204, wherein the vacuum control unit 206 is secured to the outer surface of the missile 104a using a suitable releasable connector. When the missile 104a is fired by the operator of the drone 102 (or another type of aircraft) by releasing connectors between the surface of the missile 204a and the vacuum mounting module 202, the vacuum mounting modules 202 remain releasably secured to the drone 102. When the drone 102 returns to its home base, the vacuum mounting modules 202 can be released to clear the wings and/or fuselage of the drone 102. Those released vacuum mounting modules 202 can be used at a later time on another missile 104a. After the vacuum mounting modules 202 are released, the payload installer may then install a new similarly fitted missile 104a. The drone 102 may return to the battlefield. Embodiments of the payload attachment system 100 may enable rearming of a drone 102 in a very short time, even rearming the drone 102 in a matter of a few minutes. And, if the drone 102 (or other aircraft) has VTOL capabilities, the drone 102 (or other aircraft) does not need to return to the remotely located home base.

FIG. 6 is a side view of a missile 104a with four vacuum mounting modules 204, wherein the vacuum mounting modules 202 each have two opposing vacuum cups 204 secured to the outer surface of the missile 104a and to the wing or fuselage of the drone 102 (or another type of aircraft). Here, during installation, the vacuum cups 204 may be initially secured to the missile 104a. Then, the payload installer holds the missile 104a in place on the wing or fuselage of the drone 102. Once a vacuum is established in the opposing vacuum cups 204, the missile 104a is then releasably secured to the drone 102. The process may first

secure the vacuum mounting modules **202** to the missile **104a**, and then secure the vacuum mounting modules **202** to the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft).

When the missile **104a** is fired by the operator of the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft), the vacuum mounting modules **202** remain releasably secured to the drone **102**. When the drone **102** returns to its home base, the vacuum mounting modules **202** can be released to clear the wings and/or fuselage of the drone **102**. Those released vacuum mounting modules **202** can be used at a later time on another missile **104a**. After the vacuum mounting modules **202** are released, the payload installer may then install a similarly fitted missile **104a**.

Alternatively, the payload installer may simply secure a new payload **104** to the previously installed vacuum mounting modules **202** that are on the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft). However, completely removing a previously used vacuum mounting module **202** may increase reliability since the removed vacuum mounting module **202** can be inspected for damage before reuse.

After the new payloads **104** are installed, the drone **102** may return to the battle field. Embodiments of the payload attachment system **100** may enable rearming of a drone **102** in a very short time, even rearming the drone **102** in a matter of a few minutes. Further, the payload installers may secure the released vacuum mounting modules **202** to the other missile **104a** while the drone **102** is returning to and from the battlefield.

If the drone **102** (or other aircraft) has VTOL capabilities, the drone **102** (or other aircraft) does not need to return to the remotely located home base. Rather, the drone **102** may return to a safe location away from the battlefield, and then be quickly rearmed for return to the battlefield.

FIG. 7 is a side view of a missile **104a** with four vacuum mounting modules **202**, wherein the vacuum control unit is secured to a wing or fuselage of a drone **102** (or another type of aircraft). Here, during installation, the payload installer holds the missile **104a** in place on the vacuum cups **204** that are on the wing or fuselage of the drone **102**. Once a vacuum is established in the vacuum cups **204**, the missile **104a** is then releasably secured to the drone **102**. Like the embodiments illustrated in FIGS. 5 and 6, the example embodiment of FIG. 7 enables rearming of a drone **102** in a very short period of time.

In some embodiments, the vacuum cup **204** is releasably secured to a vacuum mounting module **202**. Here, if the vacuum cup **204** is damaged during use, the payload installer may easily replace the damaged vacuum cup **204**. Alternatively, or additionally, different vacuum cups **204** may be suitable for different types of payloads **104**. Here, the payload installer may use the most appropriate vacuum cup **204** for the current payload **104** that is being installed.

FIG. 8 is a side view diagram of an embodiment of a vacuum mounting module **202** showing selected example electronic components. The non-limiting exemplary vacuum mounting module **202** comprises a power supply **802**, a vacuum pump **804** (with an optional venturi and a check valve), a pressure sensor **806**, one or more optional environmental sensors **808**, a transceiver **810**, an optional user interface **812**, optional indicator lights **814**, a processor system **816** (interchangeably referred to herein as a micro-controller), and a memory **818**. The memory **818** comprises portions for storing the transceiver module **820**, the user interface module **822**, the vacuum pump and check valve module **824**, and the monitoring module **826**. In some

embodiments, transceiver module **820**, the user interface module **822**, the vacuum pump module and check valve **824**, and the monitoring module **826** may be integrated together, and/or may be integrated with other logic. In other embodiments, some or all of these memory and other data manipulation functions may be provided by using a remote server or other electronic devices suitably connected via the Internet or otherwise to a client device. Other embodiments of a vacuum mounting module **202** may include some, or may omit some, of the above-described components. Further, additional components not described herein may be included in alternative embodiments.

The power supply **802** is preferably a battery-based power supply that powers the processor system **816**, the vacuum pump **804** (and the optional venturi and the check valve), and other selected components. Replaceable batteries and/or rechargeable batteries may be used. Preferably, the power available from the power supply is sufficient to operate the vacuum mounting module **202** for at least a predefined semi-permanent duration, which may be several weeks, several months, or even a year or more. Any suitable power source may be used in alternative embodiments, such as, but not limited to, a generator or other power source in the drone **102**, solar power, magnetic power, etc.

In a preferred embodiment, the processor system **816** monitors the power that is currently available from the power supply **802**. If the power decreases below a threshold, a warning notification may be communicated from the processor system **816** to the vacuum control device **208** and/or to the drone operator's remote control system. In some embodiments, power management recommendation may be made to the drone operator and/or the payload installer so that they can manage use of the vacuum mounting modules **202**. For example, if the power is supplied by batteries and if a low battery condition occurs, or if a low battery condition can be projected to occur in the near future, the drone operator and/or the payload installer may be notified of remaining power or battery life. Then, the drone operator and/or the payload installer may choose to replace one or more of the batteries of the power supply **802**, and/or recharge the batteries if the batteries are rechargeable.

The vacuum pump **804**, which is controllably coupled to the processor system **816**, is an electric vacuum pump that establishes a vacuum (pressure that is less than the actual air pressure) that is sufficient to secure the vacuum cup **204** to a surface of the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft) and/or the payload **104**.

An optional venturi may be used with the vacuum pump **804**. The venturi valve may be a mechanical valve that uses a spring or the like to operate the valve, or may be an active venturi valve that uses electricity to operate the valve. The pressure differential across the venturi, if used, enhances the efficiency of the vacuum pump **804**.

The processor system **816**, executing the vacuum pump and check valve module **824**, controls operation of the vacuum pump **804**. In response to receiving a vacuum cup actuation signal, the vacuum pump **804** is operated to create the vacuum that releasably secures vacuum mounting module **202** to the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft) and/or the payload **104**. The processor system **816**, in response to receiving a vacuum cup release signal, operates the vacuum pump **804** to release the vacuum to release the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft) and/or the payload **104** from the vacuum mounting module **202**. Any suitable vacuum pump

202 now known or later developed is intended to be included within the scope of this disclosure and to be protected by the accompanying claims.

Multiple vacuum pumps **804** provide reliability in the event of a single vacuum pump **804** failure. Any desired number of vacuum pumps **804** may be used in the various embodiments. Also, multiple vacuum pumps **804** can be used to cooperatively create a stronger vacuum. A preferred embodiment has two vacuum pumps **804a**, **804b**. In a preferred embodiment, the second pump **804b** may be a piezoelectric pump or other suitable micro pump. Piezoelectric pumps may be used to maintain vacuum pressure while the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft) is operating in a stealth mode since a piezoelectric pump is very quiet during operation.

Alternatively, or additionally, the vacuum cup **204** may include a small depressurized canister or bottle, or a micro-chamber, as a source of negative air pressure that can be quickly applied inside of the vacuum cup **204**. Alternatively, the depressurized canister or bottle may reside within the payload **104** (see FIG. 5, for example) and/or within the drone **102** or other type of aircraft (see FIG. 7, for example).

An optional pressure sensor **806** monitors pressure within the vacuum cup **204**. In an example embodiment, a pressure sensor **806** is located within the vacuum mounting module **202** to sense vacuum pressure. The pressure sensor **806** may be a separate component located within the interior of the vacuum cup **204** or at a vacuum port **408** (FIG. 4) of the vacuum pump(s) **204**. Alternatively, or additionally, the pressure sensor **806** may be an integrated component of the vacuum pump **804**.

The pressure sensor **806** is communicatively coupled to the processor system **816** (interchangeably referred to herein as a microcontroller). The microcontroller **816**, executing the monitoring module **826**, monitors the sensed vacuum pressure within the vacuum cup **204** on a real time basis. Once a vacuum has been established to releasably secure the payload to the vacuum cup **204**, the processor system **816**, executing the vacuum pump module and check valve **824**, may further operate the vacuum pump **804** in response to the monitored pressure within the vacuum cup **204** dropping below some predefined threshold. Accordingly, the vacuum pressure within each of the plurality of vacuum cups **204** can be controlled to any desired predetermined pressure value or range.

For example, the vacuum within the plurality of vacuum cups **204** will vary with elevation. In instances where the drone **102** to a relatively higher elevation, or returns down to a lower elevation, the processor system **816** may operate the vacuum pump(s) **204** to adjust and/or maintain the vacuum pressure to the desired target pressure value or range as the elevation changes. For example, the sensor **806** may sense current vacuum pressure. The processor system **816** compares the current vacuum pressure to one of more predefined thresholds. Instructions are communicated to the vacuum pump(s) **804** to increase or decrease the vacuum pressure. Accordingly, a change in vacuum pressure is performed so that the current vacuum pressure remains as some predefined value (or range).

As another example, the vacuum pressure may be varied as a function of drone velocity. Here, a higher vacuum pressure may be generated at higher drone velocities to ensure that the vacuum mounting modules **202** do not become disengaged from the drone **102** and/or the payload **104** due to the increasing wind created by the increased velocity of the drone **102**. A velocity sensor (not shown), such as a speedometer, provides current speed information

to the processor system **816**. The processor system **816** compares the current vacuum pressure to predefined vacuum pressures associated with speed. Instructions are communicated to the vacuum pump(s) **804** to increase or decrease the vacuum pressure to a new vacuum pressure that corresponds to the current velocity. Accordingly, a change in vacuum pressure is performed so that the current vacuum pressure value (or range) is appropriate for the current velocity.

In the various embodiments, a predefined vacuum pressure or pressure range may be maintained within the vacuum cup **204**. For example, a slow leak between the edges of the vacuum cup **204** and the surface of the releasably secured payload may result in a loss of vacuum pressure. The sensor **806** may sense current vacuum pressure that is decreasing due to the slow leak. The processor system **816** compares the current vacuum pressure to one of more predefined thresholds. Instructions are communicated to the vacuum pump(s) **204** to increase or decrease the vacuum pressure. Accordingly, a change in vacuum pressure is performed so that the current vacuum pressure remains as some predefined value (or range). Accordingly, the vacuum control unit **206** may automatically operate once the vacuum pressure has fallen outside of the predefined threshold or threshold range to re-establish the vacuum pressure.

As another example, changing environmental conditions, such as temperature and/or altitude, may be changing the vacuum pressure, thereby causing the control unit **206** to automatically operate in response to the vacuum pressure falling or increasing beyond a predefined threshold or threshold range to re-establish the vacuum pressure. Here, the sensor **806** may sense current vacuum pressure that is changing due to changing environmental conditions. The processor system **816** compares the current vacuum pressure to one of more predefined thresholds. Instructions are communicated to the vacuum pump(s) **804** to increase or decrease the vacuum pressure. Accordingly, a change in vacuum pressure is performed so that the current vacuum pressure remains as some predefined value (or range).

The environmental sensors **808** may be used to monitor external environmental conditions, such as humidity, rain, wind speed, ambient air pressure, temperature or the like. Based on sensed environmental conditions, the processor system **816**, executing the vacuum pump module and check valve **824**, may modify the predefined minimum vacuum pressure so that the vacuum pressure maintained within the vacuum cup **204** is suitable for changing environmental conditions. For example, if altitude increases such that the ambient air pressure decreases, or the altitude decreases such that ambient air pressure increases, then actual vacuum pressure may be automatically adjusted by the vacuum control unit **206** and/or the vacuum control device **208** to maintain a predefined minimum and/or maximum vacuum pressure within the vacuum cup **204** or the vacuum mounting modules **202**. Alternatively, some embodiment may maintain a predefined pressure difference between the vacuum within the vacuum cup **204** and the current ambient air pressure.

The transceiver **810** is configured to wirelessly receive and/or transmit wireless radio frequency (RF) communication signals to other transceivers **810** residing in other vacuum mounting modules **202** and/or the drone **102**. In such embodiments, the wireless communication transceiver **810** may be a low power communication system, such as a near-field communication system. An example near-field communication is Bluetooth. Any suitable low power and/or near-field communication system now known or later developed may be used in the various embodiments. A low power

11

near-field communication system is suitable because of the close proximity of the vacuum mounting modules **202** and/or the drone transceiver to each other.

Alternatively, or additionally, other wireless based communication networks and/or hybrid communication networks may be communicatively coupled to the transceiver **810**. Example communication systems include, but are not limited to, a cellular phone system, a Wi-Fi system, a satellite system, a radio frequency (RF) system, and/or a telephony system. In such embodiments, the transceiver **810** may be communicatively coupled to the wireless communication system. Accordingly, the transceiver **810** enables communication between a remote electronic device, such as the drone operator's remote control system, and the vacuum mounting modules **202**. In some applications, the transceiver **810** is communicatively coupled to the operator's portable hand held electronic device, such as a smart phone, notebook, or the like. In such embodiments, the operator, while in the battlefield, may use their portable hand held electronic device and/or another control system to operate (initiate a vacuum cup release signal) and/or monitor performance of the vacuum mounting modules **202**.

In an example embodiment, the processor system **816**, executing the transceiver module **820**, receives communications from and/or transmits communications to other vacuum mounting modules **202**, the drone transceiver, or another remote electronic device. As disclosed herein, the vacuum mounting module **202** operates the vacuum pump **804** to establish a vacuum within the vacuum cup **204** in response to the transceiver **810** receiving the vacuum cup actuation signal from the one of the other vacuum mounting modules **202**, the drone transceiver, and/or another remote electronic device. Conversely, the processor system **816**, executing the transceiver module **820**, may deactivate the vacuum pump **804** to end the vacuum within the vacuum cup **204** in response to the transceiver **810** receiving a vacuum cup release signal from the one of the other vacuum mounting modules **202**, the drone transceiver, and/or from another remote electronic device such as the operator's drone remote control system.

An optional user interface **812** may be provided to enable manual control of a vacuum mounting module **202** by a payload installer. A button, switch or other controller may enable the payload installer to manually actuate the vacuum control unit **206**. The processor system **816**, executing the user interface module **822**, may operate the vacuum pump **804** to establish a vacuum within the vacuum cup **204** and/or to release the vacuum based on control signals generated by the user interface **812** in response to the payload installer's manual manipulation of the user interface **812**.

For example, the payload installer may wish to relocate and/or reorient the secured payload **104** after the payload **104** has been initially secured to the drone **102** (or another type of aircraft). For instance, location and/or orientation of a missile **104a** that has been secured to a surface the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** may be changed to adjust the orientation of the missile **104a**. The payload installer may manually deactivate one or more of the vacuum mounting modules **202** to implement the adjustment, and then reactivate those vacuum mounting modules **202** to reestablish the vacuum within the vacuum cups **204**.

One or more optional indicator lights **814** may be provided on the exterior of the vacuum mounting module **202** and/or the vacuum control device **208** to indicate operational status of the device and/or system. For example, the processor system **816** may cause the indicator light **814** to emit light when the vacuum mounting module **202** is functioning

12

properly. Alternatively, or additionally, another colored light and/or another indicator light may emit light when the vacuum mounting module **202** is not properly working. Accordingly, the payload installer may visually discern whether a vacuum mounting module **202** is properly operating based on the visible output of an indicator light **814**. In some embodiments, the indicator light **814** may be remotely located. Here, the indicator light **814** would be communicatively coupled to another remote transceiver. A light control signal, generated by the processor system **816**, would be communicated from the transceiver **810** to the other transceiver. The light control signal would then be received by the remote indicator light **814**.

FIG. 9 is a side cut away view of the vacuum mounting module **202** with a non-limiting example cover member **902**. The vacuum control unit **206** is preferably defined by a rigid or semi-rigid body member **904** (such as, but not limited to, a monocoque body) that defines a cavity that encases the various components within the vacuum control unit **206**. Some embodiments may be formed as a monocoque body. The body member **904** protects the various components within the body cavity from damage. In a non-limiting example embodiment, the monocoque body member **904** defines a monocoque cavity that secures and protects the components of the vacuum control unit **206**, and wherein the vacuum cup **204** is coupled to the monocoque body member **904**.

The vacuum cup **204** is preferably made of a flexible or semiflexible material that is air impermeable. In the various embodiments, the vacuum cup **204** is permanently secured to the body member **904** in an air tight fashion. In some embodiments, the body member **904** and the vacuum cup **204** are formed as a unibody piece.

A port **906** fluidly couples the vacuum pumps **204a**, **204b** with the interior cavity of the vacuum cup **204**. A check valve **908** may be used to maintain an established vacuum pressure within the interior of the vacuum cup **204**. The check valve **908** has a cracking pressure corresponding to the predefined vacuum pressure in the vacuum chamber such that the predefined vacuum pressure is maintained within the vacuum cup **204** when the vacuum cup mounting system **100** is secured to the surface of the object of interest. The check valve **908** may be a mechanical check valve that uses a spring or the like to operate the valve, or may be an active check valve that uses electricity to operate the valve **908**.

The example embodiment illustrated in FIG. 9 includes one or more optional manual disengagement tabs **910**. The manual disengagement tab **910** is an outward protruding member on the outer side of the vacuum cup **204**. The tab **910** can be grasped by the user to lift a bottom portion of the flexible vacuum cup **204** away from the surface of the payload after the vacuum has been released. When the user grasps and pulls on the manual disengagement tab **910**, ambient air inrushes into the interior of the vacuum cup **204** so that any remaining vacuum pressure is released, thereby releasing the vacuum mounting module **202** from the payload. Any desired number of manual disengagement tabs **910** may be provided at any location of interest in the various embodiments.

A plurality of apertures **912** (holes) are illustrated as being fabricated into the body member **904** of the vacuum control unit **206**. These apertures **912** are used to secure the cover member **902** to the upper surface of the body member **904**. The apertures **912** may be threaded holes that matingly receive threaded bolts or screws **918** (FIG. 4) passing through corresponding apertures **912** in the cover member **902**. When the bolts or screws **918** are screwed into place

13

and then tightened, the cover member **902** becomes secured to the top of the body member **904**. Alternatively, the apertures **912** may not be threaded such that a nut and bolt **918** may be used to secure the cover member **902** to the body member **904** of the vacuum control unit **206**. Alternatively, 5 or additionally, other fastening means such as threads, clamps, magnets, adhesive, or the like may be used to secure the cover member **902** to the top of the vacuum cup **204**. In some embodiments, the cover member **902** may be secured to, or made part of, the body member **904** of the vacuum control unit **206** during fabrication.

The non-limiting example cover member **902** may include an optional outwardly protruding member **914** that protrudes outwardly from an outer surface of the cover member **902**. Optional apertures **916** may be disposed through the outwardly protruding member **912**. Bolts or screws **918** are used to secure the cover member **902** to the secured-to object. The height of the outwardly protruding member **914**, is this non-limiting example embodiment, is sufficiently high to permit access to the apertures **912** when the bolts or screws **918** are used to secure the cover member **902** to the top of the vacuum control unit **206**.

Alternatively, the exterior edges of the cover member **902** may be threaded. The interior surface near the top of the body member **904** may have mating threads. Once the cover member **902** is secured to the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft) and/or the payload **104**, the body member **904** may be screwed onto the secured cover member **902**.

Alternatively, tabs or other protrusions (not shown) may extend outwardly from the body member **904** and/or the cover member **902**. Screws **918**, bolts **918** or the like can then be used to secure the vacuum mounting module **202** to the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft) and/or the payload **104**. Clips, snaps, rails, or the like may be used to secure the vacuum mounting module **202** to the surfaces of the wing or fuselage of the drone **102** (or other aircraft) and/or the payload **104**.

After contemplating the disclosure, one skilled in the art appreciates that various types of securing means may be used to secure the cover member **902** to the top of the vacuum control unit **206** without departing from the novel features of the present invention. Similarly, one skilled in the art appreciates that various types of securing means may be used to secure the cover member **902** to any type of secured-to object without departing from the novel features of the present invention. All such embodiments are intended to be within the scope of this disclosure and to be protected by the accompanying claims.

FIG. **10** is a side cut away view of the vacuum mounting module **1002** with two opposing vacuum cups **204**. The components and operational features of the vacuum mounting module **1002** may be similar to, or the same as, the component and operational features of the vacuum mounting module **202**. For brevity, like components and/or operational features are not again described herein for brevity. A practical application of this vacuum mounting module **1004** is illustrated in FIG. **6**.

The example embodiment illustrated in FIG. **10** shows two vacuum pumps **804a** that establish and maintain a vacuum in their respective vacuum cups **204**. Alternative embodiments may employ any suitable number and/or type of vacuum pumps **804**.

FIG. **11** is a block diagram of a vacuum mounting module control system **1102** employing a designated vacuum control device **208** that controls a plurality of vacuum mounting modules **202**. Each of the vacuum mounting modules **202**

14

(slave device) are controllably coupled to the vacuum control device **208** (master device). Preferably, a master/slave control system enables the vacuum control device **208** to generate and transmit vacuum cup actuation signals and vacuum cup release signals to the plurality of vacuum mounting modules **202** using a suitable near field or wire based communication signal. In some embodiments, a selected one of the vacuum mounting modules **202** is designated as the vacuum control device **208**.

Also, the vacuum control device **208** is configured to receive information from the plurality of vacuum mounting modules **202**. Operational status information may be communicated to the vacuum control device **208**. For example, if one of the vacuum mounting modules **202** fails or begins to lose vacuum pressure, the vacuum control unit **206** can be notified of the failure and/or loss of vacuum pressure by that particular vacuum mounting module **202**. Optionally, the vacuum control device **208** may increase vacuum pressure within the remaining vacuum mounting modules **202** to compensate for the failing vacuum mounting module **202**. As another non-limiting example, vacuum pressure in one or more of the vacuum mounting modules **202** may be selectively modified by the vacuum control device **208**.

Optionally, the vacuum control device **208** may be communicatively coupled to a remote control and command center **1104**. The control and command center **1104** may communicate with the vacuum control device **208** using a suitable wireless communication signal **1106** format, such as a satellite signal, a cellular communication signal, or the like. The vacuum control device **208** can generate and transmit the vacuum cup actuation signals and the vacuum cup release signals in response to receiving instructions from the control and command center **1104** that is being controlled by the drone operator. Additionally, or alternatively, the vacuum control device **208** may communicate operational status information and/or vacuum pressure information to the control and command center **1104**. Accordingly, the drone operator may appreciate the operating condition of the payload attachment system **100**. If the control and command center **1104** is a smart phone or the like, an app may be installed on the smart phone that facilitates communications between the smart phone and the vacuum control device **208**.

FIG. **12** is a block diagram of a vacuum mounting module control system **1202** employing mesh network **704** wherein a plurality of vacuum mounting modules **202** cooperatively control operation of the payload attachment system **100**. Here, individual vacuum mounting modules **202** are communicatively coupled together. Each of the vacuum mounting modules **202** communicate information to each of the other vacuum mounting modules **202**, such as operational status and/or vacuum pressure. Accordingly, the vacuum mounting modules **202** cooperatively work together to secure an object of interest. Some embodiments may employ an artificial intelligence algorithm to more effectively control operation of the payload attachment system **100**.

Optionally, one or more of the vacuum mounting modules **202** may be communicatively coupled to a control and command center **1104** using a suitable wireless communication signal **1106** format, such as a satellite signal, a cellular communication signal, or the like. When one or more of the vacuum mounting modules **202** receives an instruction from the remote control and command center **1104**, the receiving vacuum mounting module **202** communicates the vacuum cup actuation signal or the vacuum cup release signal to the other vacuum mounting modules **202**. In some embodiments, a wire-based communication format may be used.

15

Additionally, or alternatively, the one or more of the vacuum mounting modules **202** may communicate operational status information and/or vacuum pressure information to the control and command center **1104**. Accordingly, the drone operator may appreciate the operating condition of the payload attachment system **100**. If the remote control and command center **1104** is a smart phone or the like, an app may be installed on the smart phone controlled by the drone operator that facilitates communications between the smart phone and the vacuum control device **208**.

After contemplation of this disclosure, one skilled in the art appreciates that the vacuum mounting modules **202** may be implemented using any suitable Internet of Things (IOT) technology. All such IOT embodiments, now known or later developed, are intended to be within the scope of this disclosure and to be protected by the accompanying claims.

It should be emphasized that the above-described embodiments of the payload attachment system **100** are merely possible examples of implementations of the invention. Many variations and modifications may be made to the above-described embodiments. All such modifications and variations are intended to be included herein within the scope of this disclosure and protected by the following claims.

Furthermore, the disclosure above encompasses multiple distinct inventions with independent utility. While each of these inventions has been disclosed in a particular form, the specific embodiments disclosed and illustrated above are not to be considered in a limiting sense as numerous variations are possible. The subject matter of the inventions includes all novel and non-obvious combinations and subcombinations of the various elements, features, functions and/or properties disclosed above and inherent to those skilled in the art pertaining to such inventions. Where the disclosure or subsequently filed claims recite “a” element, “a first” element, or any such equivalent term, the disclosure or claims should be understood to incorporate one or more such elements, neither requiring nor excluding two or more such elements.

Applicant(s) reserves the right to submit claims directed to combinations and subcombinations of the disclosed inventions that are believed to be novel and non-obvious. Inventions embodied in other combinations and subcombinations of features, functions, elements and/or properties may be claimed through amendment of those claims or presentation of new claims in the present application or in a related application. Such amended or new claims, whether they are directed to the same invention or a different invention and whether they are different, broader, narrower, or equal in scope to the original claims, are to be considered within the subject matter of the inventions described herein.

Therefore, having thus described the invention, at least the following is claimed:

1. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;

16

- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup; and
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump, wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a payload and the vacuum cup, wherein the vacuum mounting module further comprises:
 - a vacuum chamber in fluid communication with the vacuum pump and the vacuum cup; and
 - a check valve disposed between the vacuum chamber and the vacuum cup, wherein the microcontroller actuates the vacuum pump to maintain the predefined vacuum pressure in the vacuum chamber, and wherein the check valve has a cracking pressure corresponding to the predefined vacuum pressure such that the predefined vacuum pressure is maintained within the vacuum cup when the vacuum cup mounting system is secured to the surface of the payload.
- 2.** A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:
 - a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone;
 - a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
 - a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
 - a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
 - a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup; and
 - a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump, wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a payload and the vacuum cup, wherein the vacuum mounting module further comprises:
 - a manual actuator disposed on an outer surface of the vacuum cup mounting system and communicatively coupled to the microcontroller, wherein a payload installer actuates the manual actuator to release the vacuum cup mounting system from the surface of the payload, wherein the manual actuator communicates a release signal to the microcontroller in response to actuation by the payload installer, and wherein the microcontroller actuates the vacuum pump to release the vacuum cup mounting system from the surface of the payload in response to receiving the release signal,

17

wherein a payload installer further actuates the manual actuator to secure the vacuum cup mounting system to the surface of the payload,
 wherein the manual actuator communicates the actuation signal to the microcontroller in response to further actuation by the payload installer, and
 wherein the microcontroller actuates the vacuum pump to secure the vacuum cup mounting system to the surface of the payload in response to receiving the actuation signal.

3. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup; and
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump, wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a payload and the vacuum cup,

wherein the vacuum mounting module further comprises:

- an indicator light disposed on an outer surface of the vacuum cup mounting system and communicatively coupled to the microcontroller,
- wherein the microcontroller actuates the indicator light in response to securing the vacuum cup mounting system to the surface of the payload,
- wherein the indicator light illuminates in response to securing the vacuum cup unit to the surface of the payload, and
- wherein a payload installer may view the indicator light to intuitively understand whether the vacuum cup mounting system is secured to the surface of the payload.

4. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member,

18

wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup; and

- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump,

wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a payload and the vacuum cup,

wherein the vacuum cup mounting system is one of a plurality of vacuum cup mounting systems, and wherein each one of the plurality of vacuum cup mounting systems further comprise:

- a transceiver communicatively coupled to the respective microcontroller,
- wherein each one of the microcontrollers of the plurality vacuum cup mounting systems are in communication with a vacuum control device, and
- wherein each of the vacuum pumps of the plurality of vacuum cup mounting systems operate to create the vacuum between the surface of the payload and the vacuum cup in response to their respective microcontroller receiving the actuation signal from the vacuum control device via the respective transceiver.

5. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup;
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump; and

an outer seal, wherein the outer seal corresponds to a shape and size of a selected portion of the payload, wherein a plurality of vacuum mounting modules are configured to cooperatively secure payload to the drone, and

wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a payload and the vacuum cup.

6. The payload attachment system of claim 5, wherein the outer seal further comprises:

- one of a ferromagnetic strip or an electromagnetic strip, wherein the ferromagnetic strip or the electromagnetic strip are configured to hold the outer seal in a selected location on one of the drone or the payload while a payload installer is securing the payload to the drone.

7. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup;
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump, wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a pre-defined vacuum pressure between a surface of a payload and the vacuum cup,

wherein the vacuum mounting module further comprises:

- at least one environmental sensor communicatively coupled to the transceiver and that senses an environmental condition,
- wherein the at least one environmental sensor communicates environmental information corresponding to the sensed environmental condition to the transceiver,
- wherein the received environmental information is communicated from the transceiver to the vacuum control device, and
- wherein the vacuum control device determines an adjustment to the predefined vacuum pressure based on the received environmental information.

8. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup;
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump, wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a pre-defined vacuum pressure between a surface of a payload and the vacuum cup,

wherein a plurality of vacuum mounting modules further comprises:

- a transceiver,
- wherein the corresponding microcontroller communicates adjustment information corresponding to the adjustment to the predefined vacuum pressure to the corresponding transceiver,
- wherein the corresponding transceiver broadcasts the adjustment information,
- wherein the transceivers in the other plurality of vacuum cup units receive the broadcasted adjustment information, and
- wherein the corresponding microcontrollers effect the adjustment to their predefined vacuum pressure based on the received adjustment information.

9. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a payload;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup; and
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump, wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a pre-defined vacuum pressure between a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone and the vacuum cup,

wherein the cover member comprises:

- an attachment means configured to attach the outer surface of the cover member to the drone.

10. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a payload;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup; and
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump,

21

wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone and the vacuum cup, and wherein the attachment means is configured to releasably attach the outer surface of the cover member to the drone.

11. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a payload;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the cover member;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the vacuum cup;
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the vacuum pump; and
- an outer seal, wherein the outer seal corresponds to a shape and size of a selected portion of the payload, wherein the power source powers the vacuum pump in response to an actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone and the vacuum cup, wherein a plurality of vacuum mounting modules are configured to cooperatively secure payload to the drone.

12. The payload attachment system of claim 11, wherein the outer seal further comprises:

- one of a ferromagnetic strip or an electromagnetic strip, wherein the ferromagnetic strip or an electromagnetic strip are configured to hold the outer seal in a selected

22

location on one of the drone or the payload while a payload installer is securing the payload to the drone.

13. A payload attachment system that employs at least one vacuum mounting module, the vacuum mounting module comprising:

- a cover member with an outer surface that is securable to a payload;
- a body member defined by a cavity that is covered by the cover member during use of the vacuum object mounting system;
- a first vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member;
- a second vacuum cup coupled to the body member, wherein the vacuum cup is disposed on an exterior of the body member on a side of the body member opposing the first vacuum cup;
- a microcontroller residing within the cavity of the body member;
- a first vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the first vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the first vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the first vacuum cup;
- a second vacuum pump residing within the cavity of the body member, wherein the second vacuum pump is controllably coupled to the microcontroller, and wherein the second vacuum pump is fluidly coupled to the second vacuum cup; and
- a power source controllably coupled to the microcontroller and connected to the first vacuum pump and the second vacuum pump, wherein the power source powers the first vacuum pump in response to a first actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the first vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of a wing or a fuselage of a drone and the first vacuum cup, and wherein the power source powers the second vacuum pump in response to a second actuation signal received at the microcontroller to cause the second vacuum pump to create a predefined vacuum pressure between a surface of the payload and the second vacuum cup.

* * * * *